

## BETWEEN BLESSINGS AND PRAYER: ON THE HISTORY OF THE *AMIDAH* PRAYER

David Henshke

The daily *Amidah* prayer, i.e., the eighteen benedictions also known as the *shmonesreh*, is composed of three units. Its first unit consists of three blessings of praise; its middle unit contains petitions terminating with 'He hears prayer'; and we would expect the concluding unit to manifest termination and leave-taking. However, only the middle blessing of this section fulfills this function: the first of these three benedictions, the blessing of the (temple) service (*avodah*) and the concluding one, the blessing of peace, are clearly petitions. Hence, the very structure of the *Amidah* prayer is fundamentally problematical.

The solution proposed here is based on the earliest extant versions of the *Amidah* prayer--the seven Sabbath and festival benedictions--formulated in the Temple period as documented in the Tosefta. As described in the Mishnah, the last unit of that *Amidah* ends with the priestly blessings and not the blessing of peace. Accordingly, the concluding blessing of the primary *Amidah* was the priestly blessings. Thus, prayer had a dialogic structure: praise, petition, thanksgiving, and then blessing by God. This structure suggests that the *Amidah* was originally a public prayer and was not intended for individual recitation, for the priestly blessing is recited only in a public framework. However, because the rabbis in Yavneh required the recitation of the statutory prayers twice or three times a day by individuals as well as the public, it became necessary to incorporate the blessing of peace - containing phrases from the priestly blessing - as a *substitute* for the priestly blessing: In the Evening Service (*Arvit*), and in the Afternoon Service (*Minchah*), there is no priestly blessing. However, because the blessing of peace always became the conclusion of the recitation of the *Amidah* by an individual, as well as for public prayer whenever the priestly blessings were omitted, it eventually came to be viewed as an inseparable part of the *Amidah*.

Thus, the daily *Amidah* originally consisted of eighteen benedictions (although there appear to be nineteen) - for the blessing for peace was not part of the original *Amidah*. However, when the blessing of peace came to be considered an integral part of the *Amidah*, the blessings for the restoration of Jerusalem and the Davidic dynasty were combined into one benediction in the land of Israel in order to retain the original number of eighteen, whereas in Babylonia the blessing against heretics was explained as a later addition.

An analysis of the various versions of the blessing of the service leads to the conclusion that the original version was neither a request for the restoration of the temple service and the return of the divine presence to Zion, nor a petition for the acceptance of the worshipper's prayer. The prayer originally petitioned for the acceptance and perpetuation of the temple service, and concluded: 'for we will serve You alone in awe', which had significance in the context of a standing temple with an ongoing cult. The explanation for the location of this blessing can be derived from sundry sources from the temple period which testify to the existence of prayers uttered during the offering of sacrifices, both in and outside the temple. Apparently, the *Amidah* developed against this backdrop when, for the first time, a fixed framework for public prayer was inaugurated outside the temple. Motivated by the temple service, the set times for prayers were in accordance with the times of the daily sacrifices. Likewise, the *avodah* blessing had to be included. Consequently, the location of the *avodah* blessing is outside the petitionary framework in the *Amidah*: it is not part of the prayer itself, but a reaction and accompaniment to the motivating cause of prayer - the temple service.

## ON THE INCLUSION OF THE ‘*MIKAN AMERU*’ HOMILIES IN THE HALAKHIC MIDRASHIM

Mordechai Sabato

This article analyzes three passages in the Mekhilta de-R. Ishmael that contain halakhic statements introduced by the term '*from here they said*'.

This demonstrates that in these passages these halakhic statements disrupt the flow of the homily, suggesting that they were inserted at a later date. These statements were included in their present contexts by the Mekhilta's redactor because of the general connection they have with the section preceding them, and they include halakhic rulings based on additional sources.

The classical commentaries, which attempted to interpret these passages as currently formulated, encountered serious difficulties in trying to explain them. In the author's view, the correct way to interpret these passages is to interpret them without these statements, and only thereafter to attempt to account for the insertion of these statements in their present context.